



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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New Programs, Big Differences

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With the delivery of Growing Forward in 2009, producers saw major changes to Environmental Farm Plans (EFP) programming. Some of the changes involved funding, delivery, and technical support.

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) has taken on a major role in delivering EFP and beneficial management practices (BMPs), as well as providing technical support. Under Growing Forward's predecessor, the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), the program was a tripartite agreement between the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, MAFRI, and the Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba (FSAM). It was brand new and delivered by a third-party—the now-defunct FSAM. Under Growing Forward, the province negotiated the program with the federal government. The province now has more control over the program funding, and it is prioritizing the BMPs projects.

Under the APF, five years worth of BMPs funding was delivered in just over three years, totaling over \$30 million. The number of eligible producers started at zero, and grew to over 5,600. Taking a look at the new Growing Forward programming, there are changes to BMPs funding with two streams now in place. There are some distinct differences in that these BMPs are more targeted to specific priorities the province has regarding environmental concerns.

Under the Environmental Farm Action Program (EFAP) the federal and provincial governments are delivering close to \$1.8 million per year over four years, and around \$1 million per year for three years under the Manitoba Sustainable Agriculture Practices Program (MSAPP). With this new funding, there are fewer dollars offered than under the APF, and there are over 5,600 producers in line and anticipating project funding. That being said, the levels of funding for producers' projects are now higher than under the old program, so that means the funds approved will go further for individual producers.

Another change to the programming is the inclusion of carbon offsets. What KAP wanted to see were principles for carbon trading that would mean the farmer owns the offsets, and the province gets what they pay for based on the percentage of funding for a set period of time. This is what we think will work for farmers into the future.

Under the new programming, the province will be retiring these carbon credits to meet their green commitments. The province has a claim on the carbon credits during a three or four year period based on where the funding came from. The one exception is funding for lagoon covers with the province getting 90 per cent of the credits for a period of ten years. This principle is borrowed from the Alberta model in which private industry paid for 100 per cent of lagoon covers and took all of the carbon credits.

It's interesting to note that the funding under MSAPP is only available to us because of the carbon offsets available. The fact is, farmers wouldn't be getting access to this funding if we weren't able to offer carbon offsets to the province. These offsets will help the province meet its commitment to be "greener" in government practices, while offering producers real value for the carbon offsets we create—the increased percentage of funding for BMPs projects and extra funding under MSAPP.

Another change to EFP programming concerns confidentiality. In the past, EFP workbook related information was held by FSAM. Producers have always kept their own workbooks and will continue to do so, but there is information that needs to be held somewhere, such as contact information, when you completed an EFP workshop, and your Environmental Farm Plan Statement of Completion number. KAP agreed to be the new third-party holder of this information in order to maintain confidentiality. Producers who sign on to EFAP or MSAPP programs should know that approval of a BMPs project is determined by MAFRI based on environmental improvements, and information MAFRI asks for could cause confidentiality concerns. The benefits of possible project funding and confidentiality concerns have to be weighed by the producer.

We do have to realize that with a smaller amount of total program funding, larger funding percentages for projects, an increasing number of producers eligible, and focused priorities, the opportunity for funding has decreased.

With the introduction of Growing Forward, producers were expecting the same EFP programming as in the past—and that's where some of the frustration and disappointment comes in. We are entering into new territory with this program which has more focused priorities. The program is similar to what we've seen before, but targeted in a different manner.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 22 commodity groups throughout the province. Our strength is our democratic structure, and our mission is to represent and promote the interests of the province's farm families.